

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Report Highlights:

Report contains Italian, EU and world agricultural news items of interest for the month of January 2011.

General Information:

Italian Ag News January 2011

ITALY

Vatican Official Downplays GMOs

Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson, who heads the Vatican's Office for Justice and Peace, downplayed the Vatican's perceived approval of biotech crops by saying "farmers in the developing world shouldn't be dependent on foreign multinationals for their seeds. Such an economic dependence on big corporations is a new form of slavery." This is not the first time that the Vatican has made clear that while it's not entirely opposed to biotech foods; it is not in favor of them either. Last month the Vatican spokesman, Rev. Federico Lombardi, put out a statement about GMOs in response to Italian news agencies who erroneously reported that the Vatican had come out in favor of GMOs during a conference held by the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. In its' final paper the Academy stated it was favorable to GM crops, but Lombardi noted that only seven of the 40 scholars who attended were Academy members. Therefore the final statement was not an official position of the Academy or of the Holy See.

Associated Press

Italy Increasingly Reliant on Foreign Wheat Supplies

Italy has emerged as the world's second largest wheat importer in 2010, (reaching 6.2 million tons), just after Egypt. France is reported to be Italy's leading supplier and in general imports large quantities of wheat (soft and durum) because the Italian farmers are either unable to cultivate the crop due to terrain issues (too mountainous not enough land) and inability to provide the industry with an homogeneous/high quality standard product. The Italian pasta industry requires large quantities of durum wheat generally coming from the United States, Canada, France, Greece and Turkey. In 2009 the United States exported \$108 million worth of wheat to Italy.

Agra Europe

FEATURE STORY

USDA At Work for Agriculture in Afghanistan

Agriculture is the main source of income for the Afghan economy. Eighty percent of Afghanistan's population is involved in farming, herding or both, even though just 12 percent of Afghanistan's total land area is arable and less than 6 percent is currently cultivated. In December 2009, the White House noted that the U.S. government's top reconstruction priority was to implement a civilian-military agriculture redevelopment strategy to restore Afghanistan's once vibrant agricultural sector.

Jim Dever, served as Acting Agricultural Minister Counselor June-September 2009 during which time he opened the first USDA office in Kabul.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is helping Afghanistan revitalize its agricultural sector through a variety of activities aimed to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan government, rebuild agricultural markets, and improve management of natural resources. Projects vary for USDA agricultural experts depending on the needs of the province. As members of a fully integrated U.S. government team, agricultural experts have helped to install windmills to pump water for irrigation and livestock, trained veterinarians to detect and treat parasites, refurbished a university's agricultural research laboratory, stabilized eroded river banks and irrigation canals, developed post-harvest storage facilities, established nurseries and reforested areas, rehabilitated degraded orchards, and mentored Afghan agricultural extension workers. All projects are aimed at helping Afghanistan reconstruct the physical and institutional infrastructure of its agricultural sector.

USDA agricultural experts in the field serve as part of civilian-military units led by the United States or coalition military forces. USDA technical assistance to date has helped to construct agricultural extension centers in half of Afghanistan's provinces, train key Afghan agricultural officials, and initiate a national system to control animal diseases. FAS, along with

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), are providing technical assistance and training to help build Afghanistan's national capacity to detect and control animal diseases. More information about FAS in Afghanistan is available at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/country/Afghanistan/us-afghanistan.asp>

THE EUROPEAN UNION

Dioxin Found in German Eggs and Meat

The scare over tainted German eggs and meat contaminated with dioxin continues to spread as potentially contaminated product has found its way into the food chain of Denmark, Italy and France. The EU has been accused of having been complacent in dealing with the dioxin, which has shed light on the inefficiencies in the EU's food safety system.

Agence France Press

Scientists Make Chickens that Don't Spread Bird Flu

European scientists have found a way to genetically modify chickens so that they don't transmit bird flu. Bird flu, also known as H5N1 avian influenza, usually afflicts poultry but can cross over to humans and cause lethal respiratory problems and other complications. The first cases detected in humans were in Hong Kong in 1997. A wider global outbreak took hold in 2004 and cases have flared across parts of the world ever since. Preventing virus transmission in chickens should reduce the economic impact of the disease and reduce the risk posed to people exposed to the infected birds.

Agence France Press

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Biotech Key to Feeding World by 2050

Massive changes in farming practices, eating habits and consumption will be needed to feed Earth's population sustainably when it hits nine billion in 2050, according to a recent study by France's National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) and the International Cooperative Centre for Agronomical Research for Development (CIRAD). In under 40 years, the world will have to make farming more productive but less dependent on harmful chemicals, curb food losses and waste, protect the environment and reduce agriculture's exposure to disastrous price swings.

This puts forward two scenarios by which the planet's expected nine billion humans are fed by 2050. Under a business-as-usual scenario, all regions in the world would enjoy strong economic growth; invest heavily in research, innovation, education, health and infrastructure. Under this scenario, there is not a high priority to the environment, with resulting damage to ecosystems. Under the second scenario, environmental integrity is a key factor. To achieve this goal in sustainability, rich countries in particular would have to reduce excessive consumption that leads to obesity and tackle loss and waste in food distribution and use that today runs at around 25 percent of production. Agriculture everywhere would have to be more economical in fossil fuels and make less use of chemicals. Genetic manipulation of plants to boost yields would be necessary. However, smarter ways of traditional cross-breeding are emerging as good alternatives to genetic engineering, which is a hot political issue in many countries. At the same time, there would have to be changes in trade rules so that the food supply line to importing countries becomes stronger and more resilient, thus easing the price shocks that hit producer or customer. *Agence France Press*

FAS/Rome Regional Reporting

- Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Report (Italy)
- Greece & Cyprus Citrus Report (Italy)
- Italian Citrus Fruit 2010-2011 (Italy)
- Policies Related to Agricultural Land (Croatia)
- Pet Food Market Brief (Croatia)

- Update of the Agricultural Section for the Foreign Commercial Service “Country Commercial Guide” (Italy, Greece and Croatia)

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